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ABSTRACT

Two analyses of New York City crime data--one for the entire city, and one for the Bronx--compare the crime rates of Hispanics, Whites, and Blacks. Analysis of crime rates for the city as a whole indicates that Hispanic crime patterns are different from those of Blacks and Whites. Hispanics have lower than expected crime rates, given their socioeconomic level. Hispanic youth appear to have a pattern of offenses closer to that of Whites than of Blacks, while Hispanic adults have a crime pattern closer to that of Blacks than of Whites. At the same time, Hispanic juvenile crime is more similar to that of Blacks than Whites with respect to maturing out of delinquency: both minority groups have a higher ratio of juvenile to adult crimes than Whites. Examination of crime rates in the Bronx shows that the South Bronx, an area of high Puerto Rican concentration and one of the poorest areas in New York City, has higher than average juvenile crime rates. (CMG)

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CRIME RATES AMONG HISPANICS, BLACKS, AND WHITES IN NEW YORK CITY

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Considering the growing numerical importance of Hispanics in the United States, the Hispanic experience of criminal justice is a neglected topic. Hispanics are found in large numbers among both offenders and victims who come into contact with the criminal justice system. A 1974 survey of the 190 State correctional facilities in the United States revealed that 47 percent of the inmate population was comprised of blacks and 7 percent of Hispanics. Among inmates, blacks were overrepresented by a factor of four and had a greater probability of being incarcerated than whites.(1) In addition, a recent Hispanic Research Center (HRC) study showed that Hispanic prison commitments in New York State are increasing relative to those of blacks. Using data on inmates in New York State correctional facilities, Sissons showed that the percentage of Puerto Rican commitments to New York prisons steadily increased during the decade of the seventies. From 1971 to 1977, new commitments rose by 51 percent for male whites, by 77 percent for male blacks, and by 145 percent for male Puerto Ricans.(2) Thus, the official data available seem to indicate a greater overrepresentation of imprisoned blacks than of Hispanics, and may also indicate a pattern of increasing commitments among Hispanic groups. Overall, the Hispanic share of arrest and prison commitments places them closer to blacks than to whites.

While these figures suggest substantial involvement of Hispanics in crime, corroborative information from other official or survey data has not been available. This lack of information on Hispanic crime stands in sharp contrast to the massive body of data which has accumulated over the past two decades comparing black and white arrest rates(3) and self-reported offenses(4). In our review of this data, we found only two references to Hispanic crime rates. A *New York Times* article reported that in New York City — where the 1970 population was 20 percent black, 20 percent Hispanic, and 60 percent white — 63 percent of persons arrested for violent crimes in 1971 were black, 15 percent were Hispanic, and 22 percent were white.(5) The data indicated that Hispanics were arrested for robberies, felonious assaults, and rape more or less in proportion to their percentages in the population, but were arrested for homicide in over-proportion to their numbers in the population. The study is

limited by its exclusion of other offense types and by the sketchiness of the published data. In *Criminal Violence, Criminal Justice*, Charles Silberman reports differences between black, white and Mexican American arrests in San Diego in the 1970's, based on data supplied by that city's Police Department. The data showed that blacks were arrested between three and seven times more often than Mexican Americans, depending on the type of offense.(6) The disparity between the two groups was especially high in violent offenses, and lower with respect to burglary and theft.

This paper addresses the lack of information about Hispanic crime by examining differences in crime rates among Hispanics, blacks and whites in New York City. New York City is an appropriate focus for an examination of Hispanic crime patterns. The city has traditionally been an entry point for immigrants from all over the world. This pattern still holds true for Hispanics today. New York City has not only one of the highest concentrations of Hispanics in the United States, but also one of the most diversified.(7) One borough, Queens, has large concentrations of Hispanics from South America and the Caribbean, especially Colombia and the Dominican Republic. The Bronx has the largest concentration of Hispanics in the city (one-third), and also the largest proportion of Puerto Ricans. Two other boroughs, Brooklyn and Manhattan, also have large numbers of Hispanic residents, mostly from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Although New York is just one of the many North American cities with large numbers of Hispanic residents, information regarding crime rates in this city is important because of the diversity and size of New York City's Hispanic community.

We report two analyses of New York City crime data, based on crime statistics supplied by the New York City Police Department and on New York City population data from the 1980 Census.(8) The first analysis examines adolescent and adult crime rates among Hispanics, blacks and whites in each of four New York City boroughs (Staten Island is excluded because of its small Hispanic population). This analysis provides a broad picture of differences in crime patterns among three major ethnic groups in New York City. The second analysis focuses on delinquency rates in the Bronx, comparing rates among police precincts differing in ethnic composition and socioeconomic status. This analysis reflects the HRC's interest in the problems of Hispanics in the South Bronx — New York's area of greatest Puerto Rican concentration and the poorest Congressional District in the United States. Our analysis of delinquency rates in Bronx precincts thus provides background to a HRC research initiative on factors associated with delinquency and its avoidance among Puerto Rican adolescents in situations of high delinquency risk (see articles by Edelman, and Anderson and Rodriguez in this issue). We close the paper with a discussion of conceptual and research considerations suggested by our findings.

When examining group differences in arrest rates, it is vital to keep in mind that official arrest statistics represent a complex chain of interactions involving perceptions by victims, perpetrators, police, and the community in general. For various reasons, victims and witnesses may be reluctant to report crimes. Police may exercise discretion in recording a crime or arresting a person. Thus, in examining the data presented here the reader should be aware that unknown biases may operate in the way offenses are assigned to individuals of different ethnic, age, gender, or other groups. The question of how accurately official crime statistics represent underlying criminal behavior has been the subject of intense debate in criminology.(9) However, our findings agree with previous research (10) which concludes that reporting and enforcement biases do not substantially alter interethnic crime differences shown by official arrest statistics.

Crime Patterns in New York City

Hispanics are one of the lowest income groups in New York City, and are close to or exceed blacks in other indicators of deprivation and social distress. While more recent income data are not yet available, in the mid-1970's 64 percent of the Hispanic population in New York City was estimated to be at or below the poverty level, while 56 percent of blacks and 27 percent of whites were below the poverty level.(11) Hispanics were also more likely to be on public assistance, with 74 percent of the eligible Hispanics in New York City receiving such assistance in 1975. The corresponding percentages for blacks and whites were 65 and 35 percent, respectively. Recent data on single parent households indicate that the situation of all ethnic groups has worsened. In 1970, 35 percent of Hispanic families, 41 percent of black families and 13 percent of white families were headed by a single female (12), while in 1980, 38 percent of Hispanic families, 44 percent of black families and 16 percent of white families were headed by a single female(13). It can be readily seen that Hispanics as a group are among the most economically and socially disadvantaged in New York City. These interethnic differences in economic status are surprising when we examine ethnic crime patterns in New York City, which show that Hispanics are arrested roughly in proportion to their numbers in the population while blacks are arrested in over-proportion and whites in under-proportion to their numbers in the population. We first examine adult crime rates and then delinquency rates.

We noted above that in New York City in 1970 — when 20 percent of the population was black, 20 percent Hispanic, and 60 percent white — 63 percent of those arrested for violent crimes in 1971 were black, 15 percent Hispanic, and 22 percent white. In 1980, when the New York City population was 26 percent black, 22 percent Hispanic, and 52 percent white — 59 percent of those arrested for violent crimes were black, 23 percent were Hispanic, and 18 percent were white. Blacks had the highest percentage of arrests in both 1971 and 1980. For Hispanics there was an increase in both population and percentage of arrests and for whites a decrease in both population and percentage of arrests. In New York City in 1980, for every 1000 Hispanic individuals over the age of 18, 18 were arrested and charged with a Part 1 offense. (As defined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Part 1 offenses are murder, rape, assault, robbery, burglary, theft, auto theft, and arson). The corresponding rates among whites and blacks were 4 and 29 per 1000, respectively. It can be noted that Hispanics are approximately half as likely as blacks to be arrested for serious offense and four times more likely to be arrested than whites. Thus Hispanic adult crime rates are closer in magnitude to black than white rates. Expressed as rates per 1000 population over the age of 18, the rates are as follows:

	Hispanics	Blacks	Whites
Four boroughs	17.7	28.8	4.2
Manhattan	23.0	58.4	6.0
Brooklyn	16.5	22.4	3.5
Queens	10.0	21.2	3.1
Bronx	18.7	21.4	5.0

The distribution by types of offense among these groups indicates a similar pattern. For example, the city-wide Hispanic rate for violent offenses was 7 per 1000, while the black rate was 12 per 1000, and the white rate was 2 per 1000. The Hispanic rate for property offenses was 11 per 1000, while the black and white rates were 17 and 2 per 1000, respectively. It is interesting to note that, while whites have the lowest rates and blacks have the highest, each group has similar proportions of arrests for violent offenses — approximately two-fifths of all arrests. The pattern is similar in all boroughs, with Queens having the lowest rates for all ethnic groups, and Manhattan the highest rates for all groups except Hispanics. The high arrest rates in Manhattan may indicate arrests of people residing in other boroughs. Arraignment data supplied by New York City's Criminal Justice Agency (which interviews Criminal Court defendants to determine qualification for release on recognizance) show that 34 percent of defendants arraigned in Manhattan Criminal Court reside in other boroughs or outside New York City. Queens has an even higher proportion of out-of-borough defendants, while the other boroughs have fewer than 20 percent out-of-borough defendants.(14)

Delinquency rates among the three ethnic groups show a slightly different

pattern than that found in adult crime rates. In New York City, for every 1000 Hispanics under the age of 18, 26 were arrested and charged with a Part 1 offense. The corresponding rates among white and black youth were 17 and 55 per 1000, respectively. Hispanic youth are half as likely as black youth and one and a half times more likely to be arrested than white youth. Thus, in contrast to adult crime patterns, Hispanic delinquency rates are closer in magnitude to white than to black rates. Expressed as rates per 1000 population ages 10 to 17, the arrest rates are as follows:

	Hispanics	Blacks	Whites
Four boroughs	26.2	54.6	17.3
Manhattan	26.7	80.4	13.9
Brooklyn	27.7	59.2	15.2
Queens	20.1	42.5	22.8
Bronx	26.9	41.1	17.8

The distribution by types of offense among these groups indicates that whites and Hispanics also have a similar pattern and one different from that of blacks. An examination of differences in specific offenses showed that Hispanics and white youth have fewer violent offenses than blacks, mainly due to the high robbery rates for the latter. Hispanics are more likely than whites, and less likely than blacks to be arrested for robbery and theft, but their rates for these offenses are significantly closer to whites' than blacks'. Thus, the data show that for specific offenses, Hispanic youth are more likely than whites, but less likely than blacks, to engage in crime.

In all but Queens, where the white arrest rate is slightly higher than Hispanics', the pattern of crime by ethnicity mentioned above persists. The lower crime rate of Hispanics in Queens may reflect the economic situation of the Hispanics in this borough, the most affluent in New York City. Queens has the highest percentage of non-Puerto Rican and middle-class Hispanics, and Hispanics whose migration experience has been different from that of Puerto Ricans. Hispanics in Queens are primarily South American or Dominican, as opposed to those in the other boroughs, who are mostly Puerto Rican. Hispanic arrest rates for property crime in Queens in all categories (burglary, theft, auto theft and arson) are lower than those of whites. These rates are also lower than those of blacks in all property crime categories except auto theft. Interestingly, white youth in Queens have the highest arrest rates of all boroughs, while blacks in Queens and the Bronx have the lowest rates of all boroughs. However, the high rates among white youth in Queens may be due to arrests of residents from suburbs east of Queens. The Criminal Justice Agency cited above shows that one-third of Queens defendants lived outside New York City's boroughs.

In summary, we find Hispanic crime rates to be higher than whites' but lower than blacks', both overall and with respect to specific offenses. Among adults, Hispanic rates are closer in magnitude to blacks' than whites', and all ethnic groups have a similar pattern of violent offenses. Among adolescents, Hispanic rates are closer in magnitude to whites' than blacks', and Hispanics have a higher proportion of violent offenses than whites, but a lower proportion than blacks. These overall differences suggest that minority youth, especially Hispanics, may be less likely to mature out of delinquency than whites. This may be seen by comparing the ratios of delinquency to adult crime rates among each ethnic group. Among Hispanics in the four boroughs, delinquency rates are 70 percent of adult crime rates. The corresponding proportions among blacks and whites are 52 percent and 24 percent, respectively. Thus, while Hispanic crime rates are lower than blacks' and higher than whites', Hispanic youth appear the least likely to mature out of delinquency.

Having examined city-wide crime patterns among New York City's ethnic groups, we now turn to a detailed examination of delinquency patterns among Bronx police precincts differing in ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

Delinquency Patterns in the Bronx

The Bronx does not live up to the stereotype that is presented to us by the media. There are areas of the Bronx, such as the South Bronx, that rank among the highest in terms of urban decay. However, other areas of the Bronx are as stable and undecayed as may be found in any urban area.

The New York City Police Department divides the Bronx into 11 commands or precincts. Six of these precincts cover the South Bronx, located in the borough's southwestern quadrant. In these six precincts the poverty rate is among the highest in the nation, ranging from 34 percent of all households in one precinct to 45 percent in the poorest. The area has one of the highest housing losses in the city. For example, during the 1970's one precinct lost 54 percent of the available housing units to either abandonment or arson.(15) The remaining five precincts of the Bronx cover areas that are dramatically different from the South Bronx. These areas have higher proportions of working and middle-income families.

Our analysis of 1981 Bronx precinct data indicates that South Bronx residents are exposed to greater risks of victimization than other Bronx residents. The data also suggest that Hispanic youth in the South Bronx have greater delinquent involvement than Hispanic youth in other Bronx areas. This may be seen from the following precinct breakdowns:

	Crime complaints per 1000 population	Arrestees under 16 per 1000 population ages 10-15	Precinct Population: Percent Hispanic	Percent Black	Percent White & Other
South Bronx Precincts					
40	175	33.6	61	33	6
41	297	42.1	73	26	1
42	414	19.9	34	63	3
44	194	32.6	43	48	9
46	178	29.0	47	42	11
48	165	43.6	47	32	21
North and East Bronx Precincts					
43	108	20.8	37	24	41
45	101	13.2	9	13	78
47	113	18.1	16	37	47
50	127	19.2	15	9	76
52	195	35.1	33	10	57
Bronx-wide	151	26.4	33	33	34

Since the data refer to total precinct arrests, they do not clearly indicate, but merely suggest differences in delinquency rates among the precincts' ethnic groups. It may be seen that all South Bronx precincts have crime complaint rates higher than the Bronx average of 151 per 1000, while only one precinct outside the South Bronx has a higher than average complaint rate. It should be added that these data underestimate actual crime levels, since the majority of crimes are not reported to the police.

Juvenile arrests in New York are not as clearly indicative of crime as the crime complaint rate, as may be seen by the fact that the 42nd Precinct has the highest complaint rate in the Bronx, but juvenile arrests below the Bronx average. On the other hand, the 52nd Precinct, with half the crime rate of the 42nd, has double the former's juvenile arrest rate. We speculate that the local juvenile arrests may be influenced by varying local pressures to deal with youth crime and by precinct-level decisions about which

types of crime should receive the most attention. The two majority Hispanic precincts in the Bronx, the 40th and the 41st, are interesting in that both have higher than Bronx-wide crime complaint and juvenile arrest rates. The 41st, the precinct with the highest percentage of Hispanics in the Bronx, has the next to highest crime complaint and juvenile arrest rates. From the viewpoint of minority crime patterns the crime rates in the relatively affluent precincts outside the South Bronx are just as interesting. Two of these precincts, the 43rd and the 47th, are for the most part black and Hispanic, but have crime complaint and juvenile arrest rates below the Bronx mean. On the other hand, the 52nd precinct is mostly white, but has crime complaint and juvenile arrest rates above the Bronx mean. Thus, the data suggest that minority delinquency is concentrated in those areas where low income, unemployment, and other aspects of deprivation place adolescents in situations of high delinquency risk.

Conclusions

Our research indicates that Hispanic crime patterns are different from those of other ethnic groups. Hispanics have lower than expected crime rates, given their socioeconomic level. Hispanic adolescents appear to have a pattern of offenses closer to that of whites than of blacks, while Hispanic adults have a crime pattern closer to that of blacks than of whites. At the same time, Hispanic juvenile crime is more similar to that of blacks than whites with respect to maturing out of delinquency: both minority groups have a higher ratio of juvenile to adult crime rates than whites. Finally, the South Bronx, an area of high Puerto Rican concentration and one of the poorest areas in New York City has higher than average juvenile crime rates.

Our findings raise important research and conceptual questions. An intriguing question is why Hispanics, with socioeconomic levels similar to those of blacks, should have lower crime rates. While blacks, Hispanics, and other minority groups have in common poverty, discrimination, and other criminogenic factors, each group has a different migration history and belongs to a different subculture. It thus becomes interesting to see how common poverty and discrimination and different subcultural experiences combine to form unique crime patterns in each group.

A critical question concerns the extent to which these data represent actual offense rates among ethnic groups, and the extent to which they represent differential processing decisions on the part of law enforcement and court officers. It may be that Hispanics commit far more offenses than the data show, but are more leniently treated than blacks by police and court officials. We tend to discount this explanation, at least with respect to robbery rates, which is one of two major differences between Hispanic and black delinquency rates (the second being theft).

Another critical question raised by our research concerns the extent of differences in crime among different Hispanic groups. We believe that a comparative study of crime rates among the various Hispanic groups is as necessary as comparisons between Hispanics and other ethnic groups. Minority groups possess different traditions and occupy different yet disadvantaged niches in the socioeconomic structure of the United States. It is necessary to understand the problems specific to each group, their causes, and the specific policy arrangements which could ameliorate such problems. Along these lines, the crime and criminal justice experiences of minorities in the United States should be examined comparatively, so that one group's experiences can help us to better understand another's.

This paper has attempted to add to our knowledge of Hispanic crime by examining differences in arrest rates among Hispanics, blacks, and whites in New York City. With this information, we hope to encourage considerations of the significance of Hispanic crime into criminal justice policy discussions. We also hope that the kinds of comparative analysis presented here will encourage additional collection and reporting of criminal justice data about Hispanics and other minorities.

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